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ABSTRACT

In discussing the views of leading linguistics on the specific features of Slavic negation, the author reviews mainly Czech material and compares it with Russian and English works. This paper is part of a larger work on negation in which it is argued that a language system is a dynamic system based on oppositions (with predominant binary oppositions) where negation is latently present in weighing distinctions and discerning essentials from unessentials (i.e., in the lexical system, in denoting concepts) and before uttering judgments (i.e., in syntax). The theories of the following linguists are discussed in the present work: (1) van Ginneken, (2) Gebauer, (3) Travnicek, (4) Jespersen, (5) Mathesius, (6) Vachek, and (7) Skalicka. Otto Jespersen's "Negation in English and Other Languages," which explains a fluctuation in the development of negative expressions, is treated in some detail. The author gives recommendations for needed research on the semantics of the lexical system. The bibliography includes works consulted in the author's larger work but not cited here. (PM)

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SOME IMPORTANT STUDIES OF NEGATION IN SLAVIC LANGUAGES

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by

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0. Introduction. My purpose in this paper is to draw attention to some hitherto unsolved problems of negation, especially in the Slavic languages. I do not claim to exhaust the theme. My aim is to present the most relevant views in linguistic literature on the subject and to outline the direction in which further research could be conducted.

Present-day linguistics tries, on one hand, to describe linguistic phenomena as exhaustively as possible, and on the other hand, to embrace its subject as widely as possible by considering the reflection of extra-linguistic facts (e.g., psychological, sociological) in language with the ultimate aim of revealing universal features common to all languages.

Negation is a linguistic phenomenon which requires a double approach: meticulous description, on the one hand, and a consideration of extra-linguistic reality as reflected in natural languages, on the other.

Some linguistic phenomena intersect several linguistic levels and cannot be described in isolation. One of these is negation which, being first of all a philosophical category, is reflected in natural languages on the lexico-semantic as well as on the syntactic level in a very curious way. The formal means of its expression are different even in related Indo-European languages. But what has

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bothered linguists and philosophers alike is the fact that language seems sometimes to go against logic as, for example, in the case of the double or cumulative negation in Slavic languages. As Jespersen (1917) said:

> When logicians insist that "two negatives make an affirmative" their rule is not corroborated by actual usage in most languages. But it would be wrong to divide languages into some that follow this rule and others that do not, for on closer inspection we find that in spite of great differences between languages in this respect there are certain underlying principles [my italics – I.E.] that hold good for all languages. [p. 62]

I cannot in this brief paper outline the views of philosophers and logicians on negation (although there has been far more written by them on this topic than by linguists) but, as nearly all linguistic studies on negation were based on (or argued in terms of) logic, I shall have to introduce the main notions.

The main function of negation in formal logic is contradiction of a certain content (A . Non-A) which is valid only for propositions (judgments); the second function is contrariety, the setting up of a contrary notion (A : B) which is valid for concepts.[1] Contradiction excludes all that is not A, (i.e., including B as well, without specifying it). Contrariety (A : B) is a special case of contradiction where the negation is "polarized" at opposing poles. Thus formal logic is based on the law of the excluded middle. It does not allow for vague terms or borderline cases which are inherent in language. (Modern logic attempts to find new methods for analyzing systems with inherent vagueness to build up a new concept of negation, cf. Russell, 1923; Black, 1949; Kubiński, 1958, 1960; Tondl, 1966; Neústupný, 1966.)[2]

Most linguistic descriptions of negation are based on these two oppositions: contradictory, the so-called "nexal" or "sentence" negation, and contrary, the so-

called "special or "partial" negation. (Cf. Gebauer, 1929; Jespersen, 1917, 1924; Trávníček, 1935; Peškovskij, 1956; Šaxmatov, 1952 e.a.) Incidentally, the notion of "nexal" and "special" negation has been one of the most discussed problems in Slavic linguistics and is of paramount importance for the Russian language. And now, in modern structural linguistics, these problems are being taken up again.[3]

At this point I would like to state a premise. To my mind, logic is not at fault for finding "illogicalities" in language, nor is language to blame for not having a "logical" formalized means of expression. The roots of this misunderstanding are, first of all, methodological: an extrapolation of scientific methods from one field to another, alien field; secondly, linguistic: a certain asymmetry of the language system – on one hand, the inherent redundancy of language (variability of terms for one specific notion), on the other hand, the inherent vagueness of language (lack of one clearly defined unambiguous term for one specific function). And that is, in fact what logic would need, should it interpret language with its own methods. Hence the understandable attempt of modern linguistics to find a formalized metalanguage for analytic as well as synthetic (or generative) purposes which, however, leads to oversimplification and neglect of semantic facts.

1. Toward a history of the problem. In discussing the views of leading linguists (traditional and structural) on the specific features of Slavic negation I shall review mainly Czech material, because this problem has been discussed at length in Czech linguistic literature, and I will compare it with Russian and English works.

When we speak about "double" or "cumulative" negation in Slavic languages, we should define more precisely what we have in mind. In all Indo-European (and also non-Indo-European, cf. Bach, 1968, p. 98, fn. 5), the rule of logic is valid, i.e., a double negation of the same term is mutually destructive, e.g., not uncommon = common, nicht unerfreulich = erfreulich, pas impossible = possible,

non immortalis = mortalis, etc. The same is true in Slavic languages, e.g., ne bezinteresnyj = interesnyj, ne bezvýznamný = významný, etc. Thus the Slavic negation does not "behave illogically" in these cases. The illogical behavior is restricted only – and that should be stressed – to sentences with quantifiers or, strictly speaking, indefinite pronouns and adverbs which, by a rule of "negation concord" (term used by V. Mathesius, 1937, p. 81) must become negative pronouns (or adverbs) in a sentence with negated verb-predicate.

When we look at modern Indo-European languages we can observe variations in the expression of negation in sentences with quantifiers:

Lat: Nemo scit (aliquid)
Germ.: Niemand weiß (etwas)
Eng.: Nobody knows (anything)
Russ.: Nikto ne znaet (ničego)
Cz.: Nikdo neví (nic)
Sb.: Niko nezna (ništa)
Pol.: Nikt nie vie (nic)
Fr.: Personne ne sait rien

This is a very simplified scheme which may, however, serve as a point of departure. The different ways of expression either with one negative element (associated only with the quantifier) or with two or more negatives (associated with the quantifier(s) as well as with the verb) has attracted the attention of many linguists and given rise to different explanations of this phenomenon.

1.1 van Ginneken. J. van Ginneken (1907) tried to explain cumulative negation in some languages as an expression of a feeling of resistance. He maintains that the logical or mathematical concept of negation, according to which two negatives are mutually destructive, has only gained ground in a few centers of civilization and has never struck root in the popular mind:

> L'adhésion négative logique ou mathématique (dont deux se compensent) est leur signification figurée, née seulement dans quelques centres de civilisation isolés; jamais et nulle part elle n'a pénétré dans le domaine populaire. [p. 200]

So that, according to him, Latin, English, German use the "logical" way of expressing negation and the Slavic languages the expressive way.

1.2 Gebauer. J. Gebauer (1883, 1885) who, incidentally, originated this discussion, set up his own theory of "qualitative" and "quantitative" negation. In his Historical Grammar (1929) he gives a functional and historical explanation of Old Czech and Slavic negation (in the framework of Indo-European comparative linguistics).

Old Czech and other Slavic languages had two negative particles ne and ni which differed in their functions:

1) ne (Skr. na, Old Russian ne, Lat. ne, Gr. mē̃ (ou) < I.E. *nē̆ (diphthongized as nei, zero grade n̥)),

which negated, according to Gebauer, the quality (not the quantity!) either, a) of single words, e.g., nešťastný 'unhappy', or, b) of verbal predicates, e.g., neprší '[it's] not raining'. The particle ne excludes, according to him, a notion from a given quality "p" thus creating contradiction. However, the same formal means (ne) might express a contrary notion, e.g., přítel – nepřítel 'friend – enemy'.

2) ni (Skr. ni, Old Russian ni, Lat. ni < I.E. *nei (< ne + deictic particle ī)),

which negated the quantity, e.g., Old Czech nijeden (arch.) 'not one', nikdo 'nobody', nic 'nothing', etc.

These two negatives, continues Gebauer, do not destroy each other because they belong to different, disparate notions which do not overlap. Therefore, there is no "illogicality" in Slavic double and cumulative negation (e.g., nikdo nic takového nikdy neříkal [nobody never said

nothing like this] 'nobody ever said anything like this').

The author traces the historical development in Old Czech. There existed three ways of negating sentences with quantifiers:

Type I: ikto nevie 'somebody doesn't know' or 'nobody knows' – qualitative negation, negated verb;

Type II: nikto vie 'nobody knows' – quantitative negation, negated quantifier in NP;

(incidentally, Type II is older than Type I). These two types of negation are common in all Indo-European languages. But the Slavic languages developed a third type:

Type III: nikto nevie 'nobody knows'.

According to Gebauer this was done to emphasize negation, and it ousted Type I, which was ambiguous. He shows the ambiguity in another example: vše nebylo ztraceno could actually mean 1) 'nothing was lost'; 2) 'not everything was lost' meaning 'something was left'. (This example was often taken up in later discussions.)

1.3 Trávníček. Another Czech linguist, Trávníček (1935), continuing Gebauer's argument, agrees in principle on the two main functions of negation, but considers the terms "qualitative" and "quantitative" inadequate because quantity and quality sometimes overlap (cf. Russell (1923, p. 88) for a discussion of the terms red and bald in this respect). Any sentence negation is qualitative, if it comes to that, says Trávníček, even if expressed by negative pronouns with ni (i.e., Old Czech Type II, nikto vie). Therefore, Trávníček introduces the terms "sentence negation" and "partial negation" limiting the latter to a contrary function only, as in přítel – nepřítel. Trávníček considers the need to eliminate the ambiguity of Gebauer's Type I the main reason for the Slavic development. His explanation is thus purely functional. It does not distinguish between "partial negation," that is, negation of a constituent of a sentence, from what I would call lexical negation by prefixa-

2. Jespersen. The most exhaustive study of negation in the light of comparative linguistics was made by O. Jespersen in his monograph Negation in English and Other Languages (1917) and in Philosophy of Grammar (1924). It is interesting to note that, even though he applied traditional methods, Jespersen came very close to the modern theory of vagueness in his consideration of borderline cases of linguistic units. In his view it is inconsistent to apply the logician's distinction between contradictory terms (e.g., white – not white, i.e., anything else but white) and contrary terms (e.g., white – black) to language. He maintains that, "language is not mathematics [1924, p. 331]," and further that, "language has a logic of its own and in this case its logic has something to recommend it [1924, p. 332]." Therefore, according to him for language as used in ordinary speech a tripartition should be set up:

A. Positive
B. Questionable
C. Negative.

A and C are absolute; B implies uncertainty and in that respect constitutes a counterpart for both A and C. Jespersen classifies the indefinite pronouns according to his "tripartition-theory" and shows that by negating the A-class we get the B-class, which is the same result we get by negating the C-class:

Neg A = B: They are not all of them fools means 'Somebody is intelligent'

Neg C = B: It is not good for a man to have no gods means 'It is good to have some gods'.

Jespersen applies his theory also to modals:

A. Necessity (must)
B. Possibility (can, may)
C. Impossibility (cannot)

and shows that it works in the same way (e.g., not necessarily

means 'possible'; not impossible means 'possible').

I would like to point out here that in the case of modals language does not disagree with formal logic, where a double negation of one modal symbol gives the affirmation of the other. Furthermore, modals overlap in their semantic fields. In Russian, aspect can disambiguate negated modals. For example, On možet ne prijti 'Perhaps he won't come' and On možet ne prixodit' 'He needn't come', whereas double negation neutralizes this distinction: On ne možet ne prijti (prixodit') 'He most certainly must come' (with only the aspectual differentiation).

Jespersen's aim in Negation in English and Other Languages (1917) is to reveal general, universal tendencies in the development of negation in Indo-European languages which lead to different results in each specific language. By comparing several Indo-European languages he sees a curious fluctuation in the development of negative expressions:

1) The original negative became weak and insufficient,

then,

2) The negation was strengthened by some additional word: either an original negative (as in Slavic languages and in the older stages of the Germanic languages) or a positive word which was reevaluated as a negative by "attraction" (cf. M. Bréal (1964, p. 200) "contagion") as for example, in French: pas (originally 'step') or in Czech žádný (originally 'whosoever'), etc.

The interplay of these two main tendencies – weakening and strengthening – led to similar, though in some respects different development in Latin, French, English and other languages. As a very essential factor for such a development the author considers the incongruity between the notional importance and the formal insignificance of the negative element (its phonetic bulk) which, he claims, was originally

emphasized in speech by mimicry and gestures.

Jespersen notes another tendency which we may observe:

3) The negative signal is strengthened in another place in the sentence.

Jespersen demonstrates the stages of the development with examples taken from several Indo-European languages.

Latin

Type (1) ne dico

This persists only in a few verbs, e.g., nescio, nolo, etc. and amalgamated expressions, e.g., nemo. Soon, however, it is strengthened by a positive word which amalgamates with the negative:

Type (2) non dico (ne + unum (oenum)).

In Old French the process started in Latin continues:

Type (3) jeo ne di (weakening)

This survives in modern French only in a few expressions: je ne sais, je ne peux, etc., but is again felt to be too weak and is strengthened by positive expressive words which are "attracted" by the negatives and felt as negatives, e.g., pas 'step', point, etc. Thus we get:

Type (4) je ne dis pas

which in colloquial modern French drops the original negative:

Type (5) je dis pas (coll.).

The English development was along similar lines:

Type (1) OE ic ne secge

weakened and then strengthened by noht, nawiht, (originally 'nothing'), etc.

Type (2) ME I (ne) seye not

Type (3) I say not

until the Elizabethans began to use the auxiliary do first in all kinds of sentences, then to restrict it to cases where strengthening was needed, i.e., questions, negations and emphasized affirmative statements. Thus we get:

Type (4) Mn E I do not say

which again tends to be weakened to:
Type (5) I don't say

This last type is evidence of another tendency, counteracting the signalling tendency: the attraction of the negative element to the verb, which results from the preference for nexally negated sentences instead of possible, but not so often used, partial negation. Jespersen refers here to English and the Western languages. In Czech this tendency is strong, but in Russian it was never developed. This tendency works at the expense of unambiguity and leads often to misinterpretation, especially in sentences with quantifiers, e.g., many of us didn't want the war might mean either a) 'there were many of us who did not want the was' (negated predicate – "nexal" negation), or, b) 'there were not many (few) of us who wanted the war' (negated noun phrase by a "special" negation).[4] Ambiguity in speech is eliminated by stress and/or pitch on the negated term. My comment here is that in Russian it would be eliminated by a placement rule of the negative element.

"Special negation", states Jespersen, shows a tendency to amalgamate with the positive word and is mostly expressed by prefixes (native: un- or borrowed: in-/im-, a-). It might, though, be expressed by not which leads to ambiguity even in English copular sentences: she is not happy which may mean either a) negative sentence, or, b) is unhappy, affirmative sentence.

Slavic negation developed along another line toward cumulative negation. We have seen that this way of expression was not uncommon in OE and ME. It is still productive in Modern English in substandard speech (e.g., I can't do nothing). It might be even a universal phenomenon, as we may observe it in non-Indo-European languages as well (e.g., Hungarian, Bantu languages, etc.).

As to its explanation, Jespersen disagrees both with van Ginneken's theory of "primitivity" (which seems to him an explanation springing from a grammarian's mind)

and with Gebauer's theory of "qualitative" and "quantitative" negacion (which seems to him to be based on a misinterpretation of Kant's table of categories). He sets up his own "pet theory", as he calls it:

> ... two or three [negatives] in the same sentence cannot be termed illogical; they are simply a redundancy [emphasis mine – I.E.] that may be superfluous from the stylistic point of view, just as any repetition in a positive sentence (every and any, always and on all occasions, etc.), but is otherwise unobjectionable. [Jespersen, 1917, p. 71]

I would like to make a point here. Although I agree in general with a certain expressiveness of negation on the level of speech (as a marked member against the unmarked affirmative), I cannot agree with the comparison of cumulative Slavic negation with a stylistically marked emphatic construction like every and any. Cumulative Slavic negation is a grammatical device which leaves no choice, hence cannot be considered a stylistic factor.

3. Prague School. The discussion of Slavic negation was taken up again by members of the Prague School.

3.1 Mathesius. V. Mathesius' theory (1937) has much in common with Jespersen's concept of "redundancy", although his idea is based on a very broad concept of grammatical concord. According to Mathesius, grammatical concord is a syntactic phenomenon by which one part of speech points to another part of speech in the same sentence to which it belongs syntactically by a formal sign which it does not need for its own denomination [p. 81].

Note that Mathesius' concept approaches Ch. Bally's (1932) notion of "pléonasme grammatical":

> On le voit: L'accord souligné par la concordance des formes est le cas peut-être le plus fréquent du pléonasme grammatical; c'est un puissant facteur de synthèse...tout se tient [p. 124].

This broad interpretation enables Mathesius to consider the specific Slavic way of negating all quantifiers (by ni) in negative sentences as a "negation concord" in which one need not, as he points out, seek further semantic or stylistic explanation. He sees the problem as a historical one: to explain the desemanticization of the negative particle ni to a purely formal sign.[5]

3.2 Vachek. Another representative of the Prague School, J. Vachek, further developed Mathesius' concept and applied his methodology (contrastive analysis) in two studies on negation.

In his contrastive study on Czech and English negation (1947) Vachek compares the different means of expressing general negation in sentences with quantifiers taking into account the semantics of the pronouns in both languages. He compares the function and development of the English any-type pronouns with the Czech ni-type pronouns. The author believes that there is a semantic need to have some kind of pronoun which can negate any possible singularity, i.e., which serves as an "exclusive' type of negation. This is one of the main reasons for cumulative negation with ni. In Slavic (Czech) this function was taken over by the negative pronouns; in English by the any- type.

Vachek's other paper (1940) is devoted to a typical Czech problem. The author takes up Gebauer's example: negation of Type I: Vše nebylo ztraceno meaning 'nothing was lost' or 'not everything was lost'/'something was left', and points out that in spite of its ambiguity this type is still productive in modern colloquial Czech. By a meticulous analysis of the intonation pattern in such sentences the author shows that in this case the intonation (pitch) becomes a functional means of distinguishing generally and partially negated sentences;

Všude to neklape means Nikde to neklape

'It doesn't work anywhere' (general negation, negative sentence);

Všude to neklape means Někde to klape
[somewhere it works] 'It works somewhere' (exclusive negation, partially negated sentence).

My point here is that Russian would prefer to express the second meaning by

Ne vsjudu èto dejstvuet [not everywhere this works]
'It works somewhere'
not Vsjudu èto ne dejstvuet [everywhere this does not work]

This latter example is possible in a certain context and with a certain intonation line, e.g.,

A ved' vsjudu-to//èto ne dejstvuet
'It works somewhere'

3.3 Skalička. Another representative of the Prague School, V. Skalička, tried to solve the problem of "special" and "nexal" negation in the light of general linguistics and typology in his study "Bemerkungen zur Negation" (1949). He analyzed the functioning of negation on different levels of the language system.

The author observes that on the lexico-semantic level the main characteristic of the negative morphemes is their potential relationship to other morphemes. Ideally speaking, they have the "widest relation-field". In actual language, however, the meaning of the negated word shows a tendency to be "polarized" to the opposite meaning thus making a step towards the positive antonym, e.g., high – not high is polarized at low, etc. (cf. the A : Non-A and A : B functions mentioned at the beginning).

The point I would like to make here is: 1) There has been up to now very little research conducted on the role of negation in the lexical system;[6] 2) Examples given of the "polarizing" tendency of negation in natural languages

– with which I agree in general – are mostly chosen from a special class of words denoting a subjective evaluation of certain qualities (so-called "empirical predicates", such as *good*, *bad*, etc.). Would it be as easy to discover the "polarizing" tendency of negated adverbs, e.g., *today – not today*? Would it be "polarized" in *tomorrow*, *yesterday* or *in x time*, *x time ago*? Would it be as easy to "polarize" the negation of a verb, e.g., *to think – not to think* into its opposite pole and would it be: *be idle* or *be stupid* or *labor* (physically)? Would the opposition not remain a contradictory one? These considerations show, to my mind, that there is a need for more research on the semantics of the lexical system, as Revzin (1967) points out.[7]

On the syntactic level, Skalička continues, negation is attracted, as a rule, by the verb. A negative sentence thus stands in contradictory opposition to its positive counterpart. (This does not hold true, however, for the Russian Language.) But Skalička points out that a negative sentence need not be based on a negative judgment and vice versa, e.g., *It is impossible* is an affirmative sentence based on a negative judgment. In this case, he explains, the substratum of the affirmative sentence is negative.

In this way Skalička tries to solve the old problem of the two functions of negation as they are reflected in natural languages. Some languages, he says, can express a contradictory opposition in a contrary form, e.g., English *nobody knows – everybody knows*, German *niemand wei3 – jedermann wei3*, where other languages such as Slavic use a kind of "negation concord", e.g., Russian *nikto ne znaet*, which expresses the contradictory opposition. Therefore, according to Skalička, the solution of the problem of sentences with quantifiers presumes a very detailed study of the pronominal system, its development and its differentiation in each particular language. Most languages have

developed contrary terms in pronomina (e.g., all – nothing, alles – nichts; tout – rien, etc.), but sometimes the oppositions are asymmetric.

Skalička maintains that we cannot consider negation on the level of speech. Utterance, as a reaction upon a stimulus, is always positive, even if clad in the form of a negative sentence. And, as the role of negation in the language system is given by its role in speech, he concludes that the whole language system is positive.

My point here is that Skalička bases his conception on a psychological approach to speech. Certainly, a "philosophical nihilism", as he calls it, would be out of place. To my mind, however, what is positive in negative utterances is the intent to utter them and not the utterance (formulated as a negative sentence) itself.

4. Conclusion. This paper is part of a larger work on negation (Evreinov, 1973) in which I argue that a language system is a dynamic system based on oppositions (with predominant binary oppositions) where negation is latently present in weighing distinctions and discerning essentials from unessentials (i.e., in the lexical system, in denoting concepts) and before uttering judgments (i.e., in syntax, in producing sentences). I have outlined here the most important published views on negation in the Slavic languages. The notions of contrariety and contradiction can be related to the Prague School notions of equipollent and privative oppositions (contrariety) and the marked-unmarked binary oppositions, but a full discussion would lead me too far beyond the scope of this brief survey. The bibliography includes some important works consulted in my larger work but not cited here.

Notes

1. I use the terms common in logic in accordance with McCall (1952).

2. Neústupný (1966), a Czech linguist, bases his theory of linguistic vagueness on Kubiński's concepts.

In (1958) and, especially, (1960) Kubiński introduced new functors for negation and for expressing the distance of a linguistic unit from its center

3. I am referring to Klima (1964); Bach (1968, pp. 95-98) discusses the problem of the placement of the negative element; Chomsky (1972, p. 207) in discussing Jackendoff touches upon the problem of the position of the negative element for correct semantic interpretation.

4. Cf. Chomsky (1972) and his example on p. 207 not many arrows hit the target, etc.

5. Two leading Russian linguists, Potebnja (1958) and Šaxmatov (1952) tried to explain concessive clauses with ni in the same manner.

6. To mention here, however, Němec (1969).

7. Chafe (1970) tries to focus attention on neglected matters of meaning and to reveal the semantics already present in the deep structure.

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